

REMARKS

The new claims 5-9 have been drafted to overcome the Examiner's objections in the IPER dated October 13, 2005, and eliminate multiple dependent original claim 4.

Applicant points out, in particular, the following items:

In new independent claim 5, it is now recited that the claimed device comprises "a retractable and inflatable member" for providing the "sealing";

in claim 6, it is now recited that the retractable and inflatable member comprises an "elastomer tubular membrane" and that "the sealing device further comprises ...";

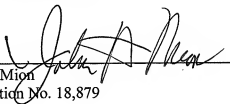
thus, in claims 5-9, the elastomer membrane is "tubular"; and

regarding the term "free state", it is, indeed a "non-inflated state". It is also a "non-deflated state". It is a "pressure free" state, where no differential pressure is applied to the membrane. As can be appreciated in the light of the specification, in particular at page 11, lines 6 to 12, it is neither the retracted state (in particular "partial vacuum"), nor the state inflated at "moderate pressure", nor the state inflated at "higher pressure". Unlike the three states identified in claim 5, the free state is not a working state but, rather, the membrane natural state where no pressure is applied, as is in the case when the membrane is not inserted in any sealing device.

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT
PCT/BE2003/000135, filed August 13, 2003

This free state is used for dimensional purpose as described in the specification, in particular on page 11, lines 13 to 16.

Respectfully submitted,



John H. Mion
Registration No. 18,879

SUGHRUE MION, PLLC
2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037-3213
(202) 663-7901

WASHINGTON OFFICE

23373

CUSTOMER NUMBER

Date: February 10, 2006